VNIVERSALIOR COGNITI ORBIS TABVLA
EX RECENTIBVS CONFECTA OBSERVATIONIBVS

A More Universal Map of the Known World
Produced from Recent Observations

1507-1508
Joann Ruysch

THIS MAP represents the epoch-making transition between the fifteenth century view of the world (as represented by the classical Greek ideas of Ptolemy) and the result of adding a fourth continent to the known world in the era of Renaissance discoveries. It was included as a supplementary modern map in the 1508 Rome edition of Ptolemy's Geography and in some examples of the 1507 edition. We know the map was compiled after 1507 because an inscription in the Indian Ocean refers to Portuguese discoveries in that year. We also know it appeared no later than the 1508 edition of Ptolemy's Geography.

From a commentary by Marcus Beneventanus in the 1508 edition of Ptolemy, we learn that Joann Ruysch was the author of the map and "a most painstaking geographer in drawing the globe." He was born circa 1460 in Utrecht and entered the Benedictine monastery of St. Martin in Cologne, where he took his vows in 1492. He was a skilled astronomer and painter, enabling him to obtain a post in the Vatican around 1507, where he apparently produced this map. He died in Cologne in 1533. Beneventanus also wrote that Ruysch told him that "he sailed from southern England along the 53rd parallel to the eastern shore…". Conjecture is that he accompanied John Cabot on his second voyage out of Bristol in May, 1497. In June of that year Ruysch could have participated in probable discoveries made in Newfoundland.

The map was engraved on two copper plates by an unknown workman. The method of engraving the lettering on this map is of particular interest as it was done with stamps or punches of three different sizes. With the exception of the capital O in the middle size, which had become lost sometime between 1490 and the date of this map, these punches were the same as those engraved on the maps in the Rome Ptolemy of 1490. These sizes are also repeated on the earlier printed Contarini map of 1506, of which one copy exists. This gives even more credence to a theory that both maps are derived from a common source.

The map is drawn on a conical projection with the length of a degree of latitude made equal to a degree of longitude at the equator. The eastern and western edges are clearly designed to be fitted together to represent the whole known world. Using this scale, there are approximately 65° of longitude shown on the map between the west coast of Ireland (Dursey Head) and Newfoundland. The true difference in longitude is about 43°. This represents a substantial overestimation in the width of the Atlantic Ocean. Following ancient practice, classical Greek climates are named on the eastern margin. On the western edge, latitude is measured by length of the longest day in hours or months as one goes further north (note that the fraction ¾ is represented as ½ ¼).

As we look over the map from north to south in the American hemisphere, we see the influence of the great voyages of discovery just a few years before. Greenland, Labrador and Newfoundland are attached to Asia, and the southern coastline of Newfoundland leads directly to the land of Gog and Magog in northern Asia. From here, it was believed that invaders would overrun medieval Europe on the Day of Judgement. Terra Nova is one of the earliest uses of this place-name, probably for modern Newfoundland. Insula Baccalauras, the Romance word for codfish, "baccallaos", a favorite of the Portuguese fishermen after their discovery by the Gaspar and Miguel Corte-Real expeditions in 1500 and 1502 respectively, also makes one of its earliest appearances on a map. We also find the following inscription derived from Ruysch's possible expedition with Cabot where magnetic variation was observed: "Here the ship's compass does not hold (loses its property) and no ship with iron on board is able to get away".

Ruysch's representation of the West Indies relies on the four well-known voyages of Christopher Columbus between 1492 and 1502. The islands of Hispaniola (Spagnola), Monserrat (Moferrato), Dominica (La Dominica), Martinique (Matinina) and the Virgin Islands (Le xi mil virgines [11,000 virgins]) are clearly named. The last derived its name from the legend of Ursula who wished to put off her marriage to the pagan king of Brittany and took 10,999 other virgins with her on a three-year cruise. Cuba is represented as a peninsula with the inscription on its western coast that the ships of Ferdinand, King of Spain, had reached that far. To the southwest, we see the confusion of Cuba with the island of Cipangu as reported by Marco Polo. "M. Polo says that 1400 miles to the east of the port of Zaiton there is a very large island called Cipango, …with a great abundance of gold and all kinds of gems. But as the islands of the Spaniards occupy this spot, we do not dare to locate this island here…".

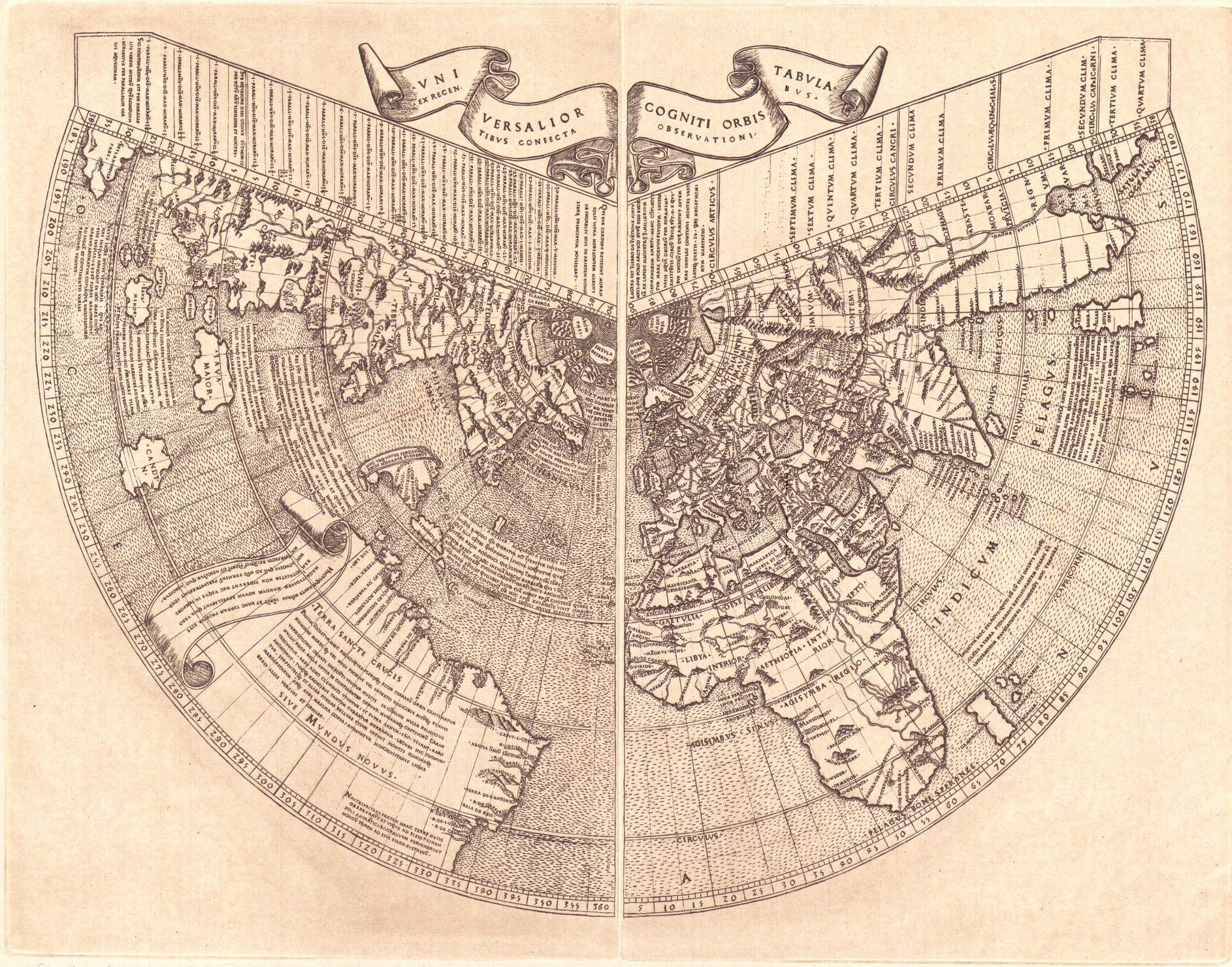
The information regarding South America is derived largely from the observations of Pedro Cabral and Amerigo Vespucci and represents the coasts of Venezuela and Brazil in more detail than on some later maps. The name "Terra sancte crucis sive mundus novus" (The Holy Land of the Cross or the New World) is of Portuguese origin and an inscription describes the inhabitants thus: "At different places this region is inhabited…they are continually at war with themselves. They eat the human flesh of captives. They exercise so much in the salubrious air that they live more than one hundred and fifty years. They are rarely sick, and then they cure themselves only with the roots of plants. There are lions here, and serpents, and other terrible monsters are found in the forests…".

The name "ABATIA ŌNIV̄ SĀCTORV̄" (All Saints Abbey; now Abbadia) is a corruption of the Portuguese inscription on the Cantino map of ca. 1502: "a baia de todos los sanctos" (All Saints Bay). At the bottom of the map it states that "Portuguese sailors have observed this part of this land as far as 50° S. latitude without seeing its southern limit", a shortcoming that Ferdinand Magellan was to rectify some fifteen years later.

Using the original printing methods and handmade paper, Speculum Orbis Press has published a reprint of Joann Ruysch's map. Our map was produced from two copper plates, hand-inked and printed by master printer Sarah Burnham Mertz. The paper was handmade by Barcham Green at Hayle Mill, Maidstone, Kent, England. The sheets are watermarked with the year of manufacture, initials, and two other devices used at the mill. This issue is the first known intaglio reprint of the Ruysch map, carefully suggesting the look and feel of the original engraving.

Commentary by Dr. David Woodward

world C-101 (1507-08) fac. [Arch.]



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